

Notes upon *Coccothraustes vespertina* as a Cagebird.—In 'The Auk' for January, 1889, I presented a few notes having reference to the sudden appearance, at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, of the Evening Grosbeak in considerable numbers. The migration to which my remarks referred occurred in October and November, 1888, and I went on to say how fortunate I was upon that occasion in collecting quite a number of those beautiful birds. As the flocks became larger and more numerous I would, in firing into them with the fine dust shot I was using, often wound several individuals, but these were despatched in the usual way and either skins or skeletons made up from the specimens. Later, however, the thought struck me that it would be a good thing to try and save some of these slightly wounded ones with the view of making cage pets of them, and as luck would have it the very same afternoon I came upon a flock numbering considerably over a hundred. They were resting in an old, leafless piñon tree, and in the midst of the flock sat a stately male whose olive green coat was nearly black, it was so dark, and the white of his wings was dazzling in contrast, it was so very white. At the double report of my gun a dozen or fifteen came tumbling down through the tree, and fell upon the spotless, drifted snow beneath it;—such beauties! Among them, with his jet-black wings and tail spread out upon this powdery frozen carpet, lay the fine old patriarch of the flock, for I had made him the target of my first barrel. After all these specimens had been cared for, each placed with the due precautions in its separate paper cone, there was discovered sitting on a side-twig of another scrubby pine, near by, a fine female, that had evidently sustained some wounds. Upon capturing her these were found to consist in a broken wing and leg, and an oblique shot through the corner of the eye, but red-eyed and fractured as she was, I determined to take her home in her then condition and see what good nursing would do towards repairing her numerous injuries.

To shorten this part of my account, I will only add that in due time she made a most excellent recovery, and long before that came about she had become wonderfully gentle, and allowed me to handle her without biting me with her powerful beak, as she would do for a week or more just after her capture. She was kept upon a pine bough in the deep recess of a window in my study, and fed every day upon fresh cedar berries of which these birds are inordinately fond, and with which she would gorge herself as fast as she could see to pick them from the branches by the aid of her single good eye, and her crippled limbs to get about among the twigs with. Shortly her eye was much improved, and she would whistle shrilly as soon as she caught sight of me coming towards her with a fresh branch loaded with her favorite food. In eating the berries the outside skin and soft part are rapidly removed by rolling them deftly around between the powerful mandibles, when the seed is quickly swallowed, and the bird ducks over and picks a fresh one to extract the seed in the same manner, and this she would keep up until her alimentary canal seemed almost ready to burst with the unnatural distention. Some time

during the latter part of this same month of November I succeeded, by the same means, in securing a magnificent old male, he being in full autumnal plumage when taken, and his wound a tip on the wing with a single dust-shot. My delight can be well imagined, as I marched home with him and introduced his lordship to my first pet, who now seemed as happy as a lark in her open cage formed by the capacious window-recess with a goodly pine branch stretched across it. Soon it was to be seen which of the pair was to be 'cock of the walk,' and the male bird assumed the position, becoming master of the situation with no little display of tyranny, I thought. Towards myself, however, he was quite as gentle as his amiable mate, for he soon allowed me to hold him in my hand and stroke his pretty head with my finger. They soon came to be very fond of hemp-seed, and they frequently bathed with evident relish in a shallow dish of water placed at their disposal. During January of the following year, a freezing cold month, they were brought by me in a small cage of my own construction to Washington; the journey proved to be quite as eventful for the birds as it was for their owner. But they accommodated themselves marvelously well to the varying circumstances, and the first thing I did upon bringing them into their eastern home was to place the pair in a new and commodious cage.

When it came round to March a noteworthy change came over their night habits, for up to that date the pair invariably roosted together, with their heads under their wings, all night long. But during the early part of March the male only kept his perch, sleeping away, while the female bird nearly the entire night incessantly hopped from perch to perch in a restless, uneasy manner. This she persisted in for about a week, when she in turn kept quiet, and then it was the male, who had his week of nights devoted to the same performance.

It looked almost as if the migrating instinct were so strong in them that they had to give vent to it in some way or other, and this extraordinary behavior were the outcome of it. They were now in full feather, and thoroughly reconciled to their quarters; they ate heartily of any of the smaller, sweet seeds, such as apple, maple, hemp, and others, and so were fat and in good condition. Even when the thermometer was down to 32° F. they would bathe, this too, when the cage was hanging outside my window; the male in all such matters invariably serving himself first, driving off his patient partner with a loud, sharp snapping of his bill, and a few, plainly to be understood, threatening notes. Neither of these birds, however, for the entire time they have been in my possession (within a few days of a year now) has ever given vent to anything that might be considered a song. Both utter a kind of screech-whistle, not unlike one of the notes of the English Sparrow, and, indeed, it is usually called forth by one or more of those birds *shrilling* in their usual way in the neighborhood. Other birds, though, will also excite them when they come near the cage, and my Grosbeaks will frantically skip from perch to perch, and the peculiar note to which I refer may be heard for some considerable distance away. At other times they have a low, plaintive note

that is quite pleasing to my ear, as are some of their expressions of pleasure while feeding or bathing. In all this the female is just as often heard as the male, and her voice has precisely the same power, pitch, and tone. In May I was delighted on one occasion to observe the female receive the approaches of her mate, and I immediately supplied them with the most suitable building materials my mind could suggest, as well as a sheltered forked limb. In a few days the female started a nest of fine black roots, and slivers of cedar-bark. She had about half finished the structure when the male bird deliberately pulled it to pieces, and all my efforts to get her to try it once more, were entirely futile.

Much to my surprise they both began to moult by the third week in June, and by the middle of July they presented sorry figures indeed. This change I had dreaded for some time, as I felt sure the male would lose some of his original brilliancy of plumage, but as this latter began to come out again early in August, the only change I saw, which was as interesting as it was contrary to my liking, was a pure white elliptical spot as big as a cherry-stone on the lower third of the outer feather on either side of his otherwise dead black tail. In fact the green of his body color came out fully a shade darker. During the middle of August a cat nearly got both of them, and pulled out a great many of their feathers, and strange to say in the case of the male, who lost one of the white-spotted feathers on one side of his tail, when it came again it was as black as a coal all over, so that at the present writing he has the white area only on one side. No change occurred in the plumage of the female, who now (October 24, 1889) is in beautiful feather, and one of the most graceful birds I ever saw in a cage. They are passionately fond of small butterflies and common house flies, and will greedily take either from your fingers when held to them between the wires of their cage. A very curious habit is to be observed, that, so far, has only been indulged in by the male; sometimes when he is chilled after a shower, and the sun comes out warm and bright, and streams through the cage, he will, standing on a perch, tilt himself way over sidewise, open his bill, close his eyes, and fluff up all his feathers until he looks double his natural size, and he apparently greatly enjoys the heat of the sun as it can thus gain access to his skin. Since the moult the female has been the master of the cage, and now has things pretty much her own way, but on the whole they are a pretty amiably disposed pair of birds, and give me every reason to believe that they are eminently contented in their confinement; and they are certainly a source of daily pleasure to me, as some of their low notes are very sweet, and the lovely harmony of their plumage never tires me. I look eagerly for the coming of spring, as I still hope that I may get her to breed, or even, perhaps, to lay; and as soon as the season sets in a thoroughly quiet place will be set aside to hang their cage in, as *quiet* is the great secret of getting native birds to lay and breed in captivity.—R. W. SHUFELDT, *Washington, D. C.*